



# Introduction

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## Introduction

In 2003, UNESCO proclaimed the Korean theatrical art form of *pansori* as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The epic vocal genre *pansori*, combining literary, dramatic and musical elements, has been regarded as one of the most unique and precious Korean cultural traditions for a few centuries. In 1964, *pansori* was designated as Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 5 by the Korean government, as part of a program designed for the preservation and promotion of Korea's precious cultural assets.

*pansori* is a one-man operatic genre. The term *pansori* is a combining word of *pan* (space or stage) and *sori* (sound or song). A singer, traditionally called *gwangdae*, delivers an epic story through *sori* (song), *aniri* (narration), and *ballim* (gesture). A drummer, called *gosu*, plays the *buk* (barrel-shaped drum) to accompany the singer. The drummer plays various *jangdan* (rhythmic cycles) and also gives out calls of encouragement or *chuimsae* at appropriate moments. Audience members also often participate in *chuimsae* which creates a lively and interactive performance.

It is believed that *pansori* was developed as a performance genre during the 18th century. Many Korean scholars agree that the origin of *pansori* can be traced to the shamanic music of the southwestern Jeolla Province because the same *jangdan* and *jo* (modes) used in *pansori* are rooted in the music of the region (Chapter II explores the theory of *pansori*). *Manhwajip*, an 18th-century publication by the aristocrat Yu Jinhan (1711-91), contains the Chinese verse of the Song of *Chunhyang*. This suggests that *pansori*, initially developed among the lower class, was also adored by the aristocrats in the 18th century. Another aristocrat of the time, Song Manjae (1788-1851), listed twelve repertoires of *pansori* in his poem *Gwanuhui* ("Viewing the Folk Entertainers' Performance"). Among them, five repertoires of *pansori* have been transmitted as follows (the contents of the five repertoires of *pansori* are narrated in Chapter V):

- 1) *Chunhyangga* (*Song of Chunhyang*); A love story between an aristocrat, Yi Mongryong, and Chunhyan, the daughter of a retired female entertainer.
- 2) *Simcheongga* (*Song of Sim Cheong*); A story of the filial daughter, Sim Cheong, who devoted her life to her blind father.
- 3) *Heungboga* (*Song of Heungbo*); A story about a wicked elder brother Nolbo and his virtuous younger brother Heungbo.
- 4) *Sugungga* (*Song of the Underwater Palace*); A story of a loyal tortoise who undergoes a chase to find the liver of a hare in order to save the life of the Dragon King.

5) *Jeokbyeokga* (*Song of the Red Cliff*); A story of the Chibi (or *Jeokbyeok* in Korean) Battle of China (208 CE) from the Chinese novel *Sanguozhi Yenyi* (*The Tale of the Three Kingdoms*).

Many *pansori* singers have honed their own creative styles, called *deoneum*, for centuries. Distinct regional styles have also concurrently developed. As a result, three schools have been established in the late 19th century; *Dongpyeonje* (eastern school), *Seopyeonje* (western school),<sup>1</sup> and *Junggoje* (upper middle school). Many famous singers, called *myeongchang*, who contributed their lives to establish various schools from the late 19th century, are described in Chapter III. Other singers cultivated their own tastes to create local schools, such as Boseong sori of Boseong City, or personal schools, such as *Dongcho* style after the famous singer Kim Yeonsu (1907-74, whose penname is *Dongcho*) described in Chapter II.

During the Japanese annexation (1910-45), a new genre of *changgeuk* was developed from *pansori*. The new theatrical form was inspired by Western opera and the advent of modern theater. In *changgeuk*, singers take on separate and individual roles, unlike the solo singer who assumes all character role in the conventional *pansori* genre. *Changgeuk* was very popular by the early 1960s. In particular, *changgeuk* performed by an all-female cast, called *yeoseong gukgeuk*, well-liked among the people during this time period. Chapter IV deals with the growth and decline of the genre *changgeuk*.

Since the late 20th century, many *pansori* singers are trying to compose new pieces. In fact, some singers created new compositions during the Japanese colonial period, such as *Yeolsaga* (*Song of Patriots*), and in the 1980s, such as *Yesujeon* (*Song of Jesus*) by Pak Dongjin and *Ojeok* (*Five Bandits*) by Im Jintaek (see Chapter I). However, it was during the 21st century when many musicians endeavored to create new compositions or develop new genres. For instance, the Festival for *Ttorang gwangdae* (local singers) in Jeonju City attempted to support *pansori* compositions that might appeal more easily to today's audience. During the festival, *pansori* narratives based on the computer game *Starcraft* or on topics from everyday life appeared (see Chapter I). Today, *pansori* singers are continuously trying to design many new experiments to keep *pansori* as a “living” tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> *Seopyeonje* is also the title of a popular 1993 film on *pansori* directed by Im Gwontaek.